

Outrage as DWP reveals 'target' to reject the vast majority of benefit appeals

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Theresa May has admitted there are some issues around benefit assessments (Photo: Getty)

The government faces outrage after it was accused of setting a target to turn down the vast majority of benefit appeals.

Critics branded the system a "sham" after the policy was released by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The row involves Mandatory Reconsiderations (MRs) - internal reviews people must go through if their claims for welfare are rejected, before they can launch a full appeal.

MRs were already under fire because they are far less likely than full appeals to end in victory.

Now it's been revealed staff have a performance measure that says 80% of decisions "are to be upheld" - in other words, MRs reject 80% of claims.

They met this 'Key Performance Indicator' between April 2016 and March 2017 after rejecting 87% of claims, the DWP statement said.

Following a backlash DWP sources insisted the measure is "not a target" and is used to judge the accuracy of original decisions - not pre-judge MRs.

But critics said it had exposed the "disgraceful" system as a "sham".

Theresa May roasted over funding **for people with learning disabilities**

Just 20% of ESA reconsiderations end in victory - compared to 47% of full appeals (Photo: John Stillwell/PA Wire)

Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Debbie Abrahams said: "The Government's target that 80% of MRs should be rejected shows their assessment process for the sham it is.

"It's no wonder disabled people have no confidence in this Government."

Phil Reynolds of Parkinson's UK branded the measure "disgraceful", adding: "These outrageous targets must be abolished to ensure people with Parkinson's get the support they desperately need, rather than facing a system rigged against them."

The government has faced calls to scrap MRs because they are far less likely to result in victory than an independent tribunal.

Claimants of one benefit, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), won just 20% of MRs from October 2013 to April 2016.

Yet 47% of those who went to a full tribunal won their case.

For Personal Independence Payment (PIP) the gap is even starker - 17% of MRs succeed, compared to 61% of tribunals.

Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Debbie Abrahams said the system was a "sham" (Photo: Daily Mirror)

PIP is the only benefit not included in the formal performance measure, but is still tracked informally using the same 80% threshold.

The government insists tribunals are more successful because most claimants provide extra evidence.

But campaigners say MRs have missed simple mistakes like ticking the wrong box.

Genevieve Edwards of the MS Society said: "Many people with MS aren't getting the correct decision - so we're concerned about the impact this target might have on people's timely access to the support they need."

Mencap spokesman Rob Holland added the "target" was "deeply concerning".

He said: "MRs should be a tool to protect people from the effects of incorrect decisions, but their use appears to act as further evidence of a benefits system stacked against the people it is designed to support."

A DWP source insisted the measure was "not a target".

A spokeswoman said: "Mandatory reconsiderations look at all the evidence afresh, including any new evidence provided by the claimant.

"Our key performance measures are strictly used to assess the accuracy of the original benefit decisions.

"We want to ensure we get decisions right first time around, and performance measures help to monitor this."

Labour candidate Neil Coyle, a former director of the Disability Alliance, branded that statement "disingenuous".

He said: "Even if you take the DWP at face value they should be looking at why so many of these reconsiderations are overturned at appeal.

"They're spending millions of pounds of public money on reconsiderations that are a complete fraud.

"People should never have had an additional barrier put in front of them and the DWP should quit the fakery."